Aqeedah Tahawiyyah

Imam Abu Ja`far al-Tahawi:

Imam Abu Ja`far al-Tahawi (239-321) can be said to represent the creed of both Ash`aris and Maturidis, especially the latter, as he was also following the Hanafi madhhab. We have therefore chosen to include the entire translated text of his Statement of Islamic Doctrine commonly known as the `aqida tahawiyya. This text, representative of the viewpoint of Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jama`a, has long been the most widely acclaimed, and indeed indispensable, reference work on Muslim beliefs, of which the text below is a complete English translation.

Imam Abu Ja`far Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Azdi, known as Imam Tahawi after his birthplace in Egypt, is among the most outstanding authorities of the Islamic world on hadith and jurisprudence (fiqh). He lived at a time when both the direct and indirect disciples of the Four Imams of law were teaching and practicing. This period was the greatest age of Hadith and fiqh studies, and Imam Tahawi studied with all the living authorities of the day. Al-Badr al-`Ayni said that when Ahmad died, Tahawi was 12; when Bukhari died, he was 27; when Muslim died, he was 32; when Ibn Majah died, he was 44; when Abu Dawud died, he was 46; when Tirmidhi died, he was fifty; when Nisa'i died, he was 74. Kawthari relates this and adds the consensus of scholars that Tahawi allied in himself completion in the two knowledges of hadith and fiqh, a consensus that included, among others, al-`Ayni and al-Dhahabi, with Ibn Taymiyya singling himself out in his opinion that Tahawi was not very knowledgeable in hadith. This is flatly contradicted by Ibn Kathir who says in his notice on Tahawi in al-Bidaya wa al-nihaya: "He is one of the trustworthy narrators of established reliability, and one of the massive memorizers of hadith." Kawthari calls Ibn Taymiyya's verdict "another one of his random speculations" and states: "No-one disregards Tahawi's knowledge of the defective hadith except someone whose own defects have no remedy, and may Allah protect us from such."

Tahawi began his studies with his maternal uncle Isma`il ibn Yahya al-Muzani, a leading disciple of Imam Shafi`i. However, Tahawi felt instinctively drawn to the corpus of Imam Abu Hanifa's works. Indeed, he had seen his uncle and teacher turning to the works of Hanafi scholars to resolve thorny issues of fiqh, drawing heavily on the writings of Abu Hanifa's two leading companions, Muhammad Ibn al-Hasan al-Shaybani and Abu Yusuf, who had codified Hanafi fiqh. This led him to devote his whole attention to studying the Hanafi works and he eventually joined the Hanafi school. He now stands out not only as a prominent follower of that Hanafi school but, in view of his vast erudition and remarkable powers of assimilation, as one of its leading scholars. His monumental scholarly works, such as Sharh ma`ani al-athar and Mushkil al-athar, are encyclopedic in scope and have long been regarded as indispensable for training students of fiqh. He was in fact a mujtahid across the board and was thoroughly familiar with the fiqh of all four schools, as stated by Ibn `Abd al-Barr and related by Kawthari, and as shown by Tahawi's own work on comparative law entitled Ikhtilaf al-fuqaha'.

Tahawi's "Doctrine" (al-`Aqida), though small in size, is a basic text for all times, listing what a Muslim must know and believe and inwardly comprehend. There is consensus among the Companions, the Successors and all the leading Islamic authorities such as the four Imams and their authoritative followers on the doctrines enumerated in this work, which are entirely derived from the undisputed primary sources of Religion, the Holy Qur'an and the confirmed Hadith. Being a text on Islamic doctrine, this work sums up the arguments set forth in those two sources to define sound belief, and likewise, the arguments advanced in refuting the views of sects that have deviated from the Sunna.

As regards the sects mentioned in this work, familiarity with Islamic history up to the time of Imam Tahawi would be quite helpful. More or less veiled references to sects such as the Mu`tazila, the Jahmiyya, the Karramiyya, the Qadariyya, and the Jabariyya are found in the work. It also contains allusions to other views considered unorthodox and deviant from the way of Ahl al-Sunna. There is an explicit reference in the work to the controversy on the creation of the Qu'ran in the times of al-Ma'mun and others.

While the permanent relevance of the statements of belief in the `Aqida are obvious, the historical weight and

point of certain of these statements can be properly appreciated only if the work is used as a text for study under the guidance of some learned person able to elucidate its arguments fully, with reference to the intellectual and historical background of the sects refuted in the work. Since the present book is intended exactly as one such aid towards understanding the details of Islamic belief with clarity, it is hoped that the quotation of the entire text of Tahawi's "Doctrine," which we consider as the doctrine of Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jama`a, will be of benefit to the reader. And may Allah grant us a true understanding of faith and count us among those described by the Prophet as the Saved Group.

Aqeedah Tahawiyyah

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate Praise be to Allah, Lord of all the worlds.

The great scholar Hujjat al-Islam Abu Ja'far al-Warraq al-Tahawi al-Misri, may Allah have mercy on him, said: This is a presentation of the beliefs of Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jama`a, according to the school of the jurists of this religion, Abu Hanifa al-Nu`man ibn Thabit al-Kufi, Abu Yusuf Ya`qub ibn Ibrahim al-Ansari and Abu `Abdullah Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Shaybani, may Allah be pleased with them all, and what they believe regarding the fundamentals of the religion and their faith in the Lord of the worlds.

We say about Allah's unity, believing by Allah's help that:

1. Allah is One, without any partners.

2. There is nothing like Him.

3. There is nothing that can overwhelm Him.

4. There is no god other than Him.

5. He is the Eternal without a beginning and enduring without end.

6. He will never perish or come to an end.

7. Nothing happens except what He wills.

8. No imagination can conceive of Him and no understanding can comprehend Him.

9. He is different from any created being.

10. He is living and never dies and is eternally active and never sleeps.

11. He creates without His being in need to do so and provides for His creation without any effort.

12. He causes death with no fear and restores to life without difficulty.

13. He has always existed together with His attributes since before creation. Bringing creation into existence did not add anything to His attributes that was not already there. As He was, together with His attributes, in pre-eternity, so He will remain throughout endless time.

14. It was not only after the act of creation that He could be described as "the Creator" nor was it only by the act of origination that He could he described as "the Originator."

15. He was always the Lord even when there was nothing to be Lord of, and always the Creator even when there was no creation.

16. In the same way that He is the "Bringer to life of the dead," after He has brought them to life a first time, and deserves this name before bringing them to life, so too He deserves the name of "Creator" before He has created them.

17. This is because He has the power to do everything, everything is dependent on Him, everything is easy for Him, and He does not need anything. "There is nothing like Him and He is the Hearer, the Seer." (al-Shura 42:11)

18. He created creation with His knowledge.

19. He appointed destinies for those He created.

20. He allotted to them fixed life spans.

21. Nothing about them was hidden from Him before He created them, and He knew everything that they would do before He created them.

22. He ordered them to obey Him and forbade them to disobey Him.

23. Everything happens according to His degree and will, and His will is accomplished. The only will that people have is what He wills for them. What He wills for them occurs and what He does not will, does not occur.

24. He gives guidance to whomever He wills, and protects them, and keeps them safe from harm, out of His generosity; and He leads astray whomever He wills, and abases them, and afflicts them, out of His justice.

25. All of them are subject to His will either through His generosity or His justice.

26. He is Exalted beyond having opposites or equals.

27. No one can ward off His decree or delay His command or overpower His affairs.

28. We believe in all of this and are certain that everything comes from Him.

29. And we are certain that Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) is His chosen Servant and elect Prophet and His Messenger with whom He is well pleased,

30. And that he is the Seal of the Prophets and the Imam of the godfearing and the most honored of all the messengers and the Beloved of the Lord of all the worlds.

31. Every claim to Prophet-hood after Him is falsehood and deceit.

32. He is the one who has been sent to all the jinn and all mankind with truth and guidance and with light and illumination.

33. The Qur'an is the word of Allah. It came from Him as speech without it being possible to say how. He sent it down on His Messenger as revelation. The believers accept it, as absolute truth. They are certain that it is, in truth, the word of Allah. It is not created as is the speech of human beings, and anyone who hears it and claims that it is human speech has become an unbeliever. Allah warns him and censures him and threatens him with Fire when He says, Exalted is He: "I will burn him in the Fire." (al-Muddaththir 74:26) When Allah threatens with the Fire those who say "This is just human speech" (74:25) we know for certain that it is the speech of the Creator of mankind and that it is totally unlike the speech of mankind.

34. Anyone who describes Allah as being in any way the same as a human being has become an unbeliever. All those who grasp this will take heed and refrain from saying things such as the unbelievers say, and they will know that He, in His attributes, is not like human beings.

35. The Seeing of Allah by the People of the Garden is true, without their vision being all-encompassing and without the manner of their vision being known. As the Book of our Lord has expressed it: "Faces on that Day radiant, looking at their Lord." (al-Qiyama 75:22-3) The explanation of this is as Allah knows and wills. Everything that has come down to us about this from the Messenger, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, in authentic traditions, is as he said and means what he intended. We do not delve into that, trying to interpret it according to our own opinions or letting our imaginations have free rein.

No one is safe in his religion unless he surrenders himself completely to Allah, the Exalted and Glorified and to His Messenger, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and leaves the knowledge of things that are ambiguous to the one who knows them.

36. A man's Islam is not secure unless it is based on submission and surrender. Anyone who desires to know things which it is beyond his capacity to know, and whose intellect is not content with surrender, will find that his desire veils him from a pure understanding of Allah's true unity, clear knowledge and correct belief, and that he veers between disbelief and belief, confirmation and denial and acceptance and rejection. He will he subject to whisperings and find himself confused and full of doubt, being neither an accepting believer nor a denying rejector.

37. Belief of a man in the seeing of Allah by the People of the Garden is not correct if he imagines what it is like or interprets it according to his own understanding, since the interpretation of this seeing or indeed, the meaning of any of the subtle phenomena which are in the realm of Lordship, is by avoiding its interpretation and strictly adhering to the submission.

This is the religion of Muslims. Anyone who does not guard himself against negating the attributes of Allah, or likening Allah to something else, has gone astray and has failed to understand Allah's glory, because our Lord, the Glorified and the Exalted, can only possibly be described in terms of oneness and absolute singularity and no creation is in any way like Him.

38. He is beyond having limits placed on Him, or being restricted, or having parts or limbs. Nor is He contained by the six directions as all created things are.

39. Al-Mi`raj (the Ascent through the heavens) is true. The Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, was taken by night and ascended in his bodily form, while awake, through the heavens, to whatever heights Allah willed for him. Allah ennobled him in the way that He ennobled him and revealed to him what He revealed to him, "and his heart was not mistaken about what it saw" (al-Najm 53:11). Allah blessed him and granted him peace in this world and the next.

40. Al-Hawd, the Pool which Allah has granted the Prophet as an honour to quench the thirst of his Community on the Day of Judgement, is true.

41. Al-Shafa`a, the intercession which is stored up for Muslims, is true, as related in the hadiths.

42. The covenant which Allah made with Adam and his offspring is true.

43. Allah knew, before the existence of time, the exact number of those who would enter the Garden and the exact number of those who would enter the Fire. This number will neither be increased nor decreased.

44. The same applies to all actions done by people, which are done exactly as Allah knew they would be done. Everyone is eased towards what he was created for and it is the action with which a man's life is sealed which dictates his fate. Those who are fortunate are fortunate by the decree of Allah, and those who are wretched are wretched by the decree of Allah.

45. The exact nature of the decree is Allah's secret in His creation, and no angel near the Throne, nor Prophet sent with a message, has been given knowledge of it. Delving into it and reflecting too much about it only leads to destruction and loss, and results in rebelliousness. So be extremely careful about thinking and reflecting on this matter or letting doubts about it assail you, because Allah has kept knowledge of the decree away from human beings, and forbidden them to enquire about it, saying in His Book, "He is not asked about what He does, but they are asked" (al-Anbiya' 21: 23).

Therefore, anyone who asks: "Why did Allah do that?" has gone against a judgement of the Book, and anyone who goes against a judgement of the Book is an unbeliever.

46. This in sum is what those of Allah's Friends with enlightened hearts need to know and constitutes the degree of those firmly endowed with knowledge. For there are two kinds of knowledge: knowledge which is accessible to created beings, and knowledge which is not accessible to created beings. Denying the knowledge which is accessible is disbelief, and claiming the knowledge which is inaccessible is disbelief. Belief can only be firm when accessible knowledge is accepted and the inaccessible is not sought after.

47. We believe in al-Lawh (the Tablet) and al-Qalam (the Pen) and in everything written on the former. Even if all

created beings were to gather together to make something fail to exist, whose existence Allah had written on the Tablet, they would not be able to do so. And if all created beings were to gather together to make something exist which Allah had not written on it, they would not be able to do so. The Pen has dried having written down all that will be in existence until the Day of Judgement.Whatever a person has missed he would have never got, and whatever he gets he would have never missed.

48. It is necessary for the servant to know that Allah already knows everything that is going to happen in His creation and has decreed it in a detailed and decisive way. There is nothing that He has created in either the heavens or the earth that can contradict it, or add to it, or erase it, or change it, or decrease it, or increase it in any way. This is a fundamental aspect of belief and a necessary element of all knowledge and recognition of Allah's oneness and Lordship. As Allah says in His Book: "He created everything and decreed it in a detailed way." (al-Furqan 25: 2) And He also says: "Allah's command is always a decided decree." (al-Ahzab 33: 38) So woe to anyone who argues with Allah concerning the decree and who, with a sick heart, starts delving into this matter. In his deluded attempt to investigate the Unseen, he is seeking a secret that can never be uncovered, and he ends up an evil-doer, telling nothing but lies.

49. Al-`Arsh (the Throne) and al-Kursi (the Chair) are true.

50. He is independent of the Throne and that which is beneath it.

51. He encompasses all things and that which is above it, and what He has created is incapable of encompassing Him.

52. We say with belief, acceptance and submission that Allah took Ibrahim as an intimate friend and that He spoke directly to Musa.

53. We believe in the angels, and the Prophets, and the books which were revealed to the messengers, and we bear witness that they were all following the manifest Truth.

54. We call the people of our qibla Muslims and believers as long as they acknowledge what the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, brought, and accept as true everything that he said and told us about.

55. We do not enter into vain talk about Allah nor do we allow any dispute about the religion of Allah.

56. We do not argue about the Qur'an and we bear witness that it is the speech of the Lord of all the Worlds which the Trustworthy Spirit came down with and taught the most honoured of all the Messengers, Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. It is the speech of Allah and no speech of any created being is comparable to it. We do not say that it was created and we do not go against the Congregation (jama`a) of the Muslims regarding it.

57. We do not consider any of the people of our qibla to be unbelievers because of any wrong action they have done, as long as they do not consider that action to have been lawful.

58. Nor do we say that the wrong action of a man who has belief does not have a harmful effect on him.

59. We hope that Allah will pardon the people of right action among the believers and grant them entrance into

the Garden through His mercy, but we cannot be certain of this, and we cannot bear witness that it will definitely happen and that they will be in the Garden. We ask forgiveness for the people of wrong action among the believers and, although we are afraid for them, we are not in despair about them.

60. Certainty and despair both remove one from the religion, but the path of truth for the People of the Qibla lies between the two.

61. A person does not step out or belief except by disavowing what brought him into it.

62. Belief consists of affirmation by the tongue and acceptance by the heart.

63. And the whole of what is proven from the Prophet, upon him be peace, regarding the Shari`a and the explanation (of the Qur'an and of Islam) is true.

64. Belief is, at base, the same for everyone, but the superiority of some over others in it is due to their fear and awareness of Allah, their opposition to their desires, and their choosing what is more pleasing to Allah.

65. All the believers are Friends of Allah and the noblest of them in the sight of Allah are those who are the most obedient and who most closely follow the Qur'an.

66. Belief consists of belief in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Last Day, and belief that the Decree -- both the good of it and the evil of it, the sweet of it and the bitter or it -- is all from Allah.

67. We believe in all these things. We do not make any distinction between any of the messengers, we accept as true what all of them brought.

68. Those of the Community of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, who have committed grave sins will be in the Fire, but not forever, provided they die and meet Allah as believers affirming His unity even if they have not repented. They are subject to His will and judgement.

If He wants, He will forgive them and pardon them out of His generosity, as is mentioned in the Qur'an when He says: "And He forgives anything less than that (shirk) to whomever He wills" (al-Nisa' 4: 116); if He wants, He will punish them in the Fire out of His justice, and then bring them out of the Fire through His mercy, and for the intercession of those who were obedient to Him, and send them to the Garden.

This is because Allah is the Protector of those who recognize Him and will not treat them in the hereafter in the same way as He treats those who deny Him, who are bereft of His guidance and have failed to obtain His protection. O Allah, You are the Protector of Islam and its people; make us firm in Islam until the day we meet You.

69. We agree with doing the prayer behind any of the People of the Qibla whether rightful or wrongful, and doing the funeral prayer over any of them when they die.

70. We do not say that any of them will categorically go to either the Garden or the Fire, and we do not accuse any of them of kufr (disbelief), shirk (associating partners with Allah), or nifaq (hypocrisy), as long as they have

not openly demonstrated any of those things. We leave their secrets to Allah.

71. We do not agree with killing any of the Community of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, unless it is obligatory by Shari`a to do so.

72. We do not accept rebellion against our Imam or those in charge of our affairs even if they are unjust, nor do we wish evil on them, nor do we withdraw from following them. We hold that obedience to them is part of obedience to Allah, the Glorified, and therefore obligatory as long as they do not order to commit sins. We pray for their right guidance and ask for pardon for their wrongs.

73. We follow the Sunna of the Prophet and the Congregation of the Muslims, and avoid deviation, differences and divisions.

74. We love the people of justice and trustworthiness, and hate the people of injustice and treachery.

75. When our knowledge about something is unclear, we say: "Allah knows best."

76. We agree with wiping over leather socks (in ablution) whether on a journey or otherwise, just as has come in the hadiths.

77. Hajj and jihad under the leadership of those in charge of the Muslims, whether they are right or wrong-acting, are continuing obligations until the Last Hour comes. Nothing can annul or controvert them.

78. We believe in the the noble angels who write down our actions, for Allah has appointed them over us as two guardians.

79. We believe in the Angel of Death who is in charge of taking the spirits of all the worlds.

80. We believe in the punishment in the grave for those who deserve it, and in the questioning in the grave by Munkar and Nakir about one's Lord, one's religion and one's prophet, as has come down in the hadiths from the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and in reports from the Companions, may Allah be pleased with them all.

81. The grave is either one of the meadows of the Garden or one of the pits of the Fire.

82. We believe in being brought back to life after death and in being recompensed for our actions on the Day of Judgement, and the exhibition of works, and the reckoning, and the reading of the book, and the reward or punishments, and the Bridge, and the Balance; and the deeds of the Muslims, good evil obedient and disobedient are weighed by it.

83. The Garden and the Fire are created things that never come to an end and we believe that Allah created them before the rest of creation and then created people to inhabit each of them. Whoever He wills goes to the Garden out of His bounty and whoever He wills goes to the Fire through His justice. Everybody acts in accordance with what is destined for him and goes towards what he has been created for.

84. Good and evil have both been decreed for people.

85. The capability in terms of divine grace and favor which makes an action certain to occur cannot be ascribed to a created being. This capability is integral with action, whereas the capability of an action in terms of having the necessary health and ability, being in a position to act, and having the necessary means, exists in a person before the action. It is this type of capability which is the object of the dictates of the Shari`a. Allah the Exalted says: "Allah does not charge a person except according to his ability." (al-Baqara 2: 286)

86. People's actions are created by Allah but earned by people .

87. Allah, the Exalted, has only charged people with what they are able to do and people are only capable of doing what Allah has granted them to do. This is the explanation of the phrase: "There is no power and no strength except by Allah." We add to this that there is no stratagem or way by which anyone can avoid or escape disobedience to Allah except with Allah's help; nor does anyone have the strength to put obedience to Allah into practice and remain firm in it, except if Allah makes it possible for him to do so.

88. Everything happens according to Allah's will, knowledge, predestination and decree. His will overpowers all other wills and His decree overpowers all stratagems. He does whatever He wills and He is never unjust. He is exalted in His purity above any evil or perdition and He is perfect far beyond any fault or flaw. "He will not be asked about what He does, but they will be asked." (al-Anbiya' 21: 23)

89. There is benefit for dead people in the supplication and alms-giving of the living.

90. Allah responds to people's supplications and gives them what they ask for.

91. Allah has absolute control over everything and nothing has any control over Him. Nothing can be independent of Allah even for the blinking of an eye, and whoever considers himself independent of Allah for the blinking of an eye is guilty of unbelief and becomes one of the people of perdition.

92. Allah is angered and He is pleased but not in the same way as any creature.

93. We love the Companions of the Messenger of Allah but we do not go to excess in our love for any one individual among them; nor do we disown any one of them. We hate anyone who hates them or does not speak well of them and we only speak well of them. Love of them is a part of Islam, part of belief and part of excellent behavior, while hatred of them is unbelief, hypocrisy and rebellion.

94. We confirm that, after the death of Allah's Messenger, peace be upon him, the caliphate went first to Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, thus proving his excellence and superiority over the rest of the Muslims; then to `Umar ibn al-Khattab; then to `Uthman; and then to `Ali ibn Abi Talib; may Allah be well pleased with all of them. These are the Rightly-Guided Caliphs and upright leaders.

95. We bear witness that the ten who were named by the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and who were promised the Garden by him, will be in the Garden, as the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, whose word is truth, bore witness that they would be. The ten are: Abu Bakr, `Umar, `Uthman, `Ali, Talha, Zubayr, Sa`d, Sa`id, `Abd al-Rahman ibn `Awf, and Abu `Ubayda ibn al-Jarrah whose title was the Trustee of this Community, may Allah be pleased with all of them.

96. Anyone who speaks well of the Companions of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him

peace, and his wives and offspring, who are all pure and untainted by any impurity, is free from the accusation of hypocrisy.

97. The learned men of the Predecessors, both the first community and those who immediately followed: the people of virtue, the narrators of hadith, the jurists, and the analysts-- they must only be spoken of in the best way, and anyone who says anything bad about them is not on the right path.

98. We do not prefer any of the saintly men among the Community over any of the Prophets but rather we say that any one of the Prophets is better than all the awliya' put together.

99. We believe in what we know of the karamat or marvels of the awliya' and in the authentic stories about them from trustworthy sources.

100. We believe in the signs of the Hour such as the appearance of the Antichrist (dajjal) and the descent of `Isa ibn Maryam, peace be upon him, from heaven, and we believe in the rising of the sun from where it sets and in the emergence of the Beast from the earth.

101. We do not accept as true what soothsayers and fortune-tellers say, nor do we accept the claims of those who affirm anything which goes against the Book, the Sunna, and the consensus of the Muslim Community (umma).

102. We agree that holding together is the true and right path and that separation is deviation and torment.

103. There is only one religion of Allah in the heavens and the earth and that is the religion of Islam ("submission"). Allah says: "Surely religion in the sight of Allah is Islam." (Al `Imran 3: 19) And He also says: "I am pleased with Islam as a religion for you." (al-Ma'ida 5: 3)

104. Islam lies between going to excess and falling short, between the likening of Allah's attributes to creation (tashbih) and divesting Allah of attributes (ta`til), between determinism and freewill, and between sureness and despair.

105. This is our religion and it is what we believe in, both inwardly and outwardly, and we renounce any connection, before Allah, with anyone who goes against what we have said and made clear.